

Donald Trump Is No Friend to the North Country

Sometimes metaphor, man, and myth arrive one right after the other.

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This past weekend, a taconite ship ran aground in Duluth Harbor, nearly crashing right into the Canal Park seawall. The name of this ill-fated ship? American Spirit.

The symbolism was hard to miss, for, the same week, the Lake Superior port city was to receive another patriotic vessel on an ill-plotted course through ever-shallower waters. Ostensibly in support of GOP congressional candidate Pete Stauber, Donald Trump will hold a campaign event in Duluth tonight. It is, in fact, an event in support of Donald Trump, who will happily tell everyone how great things are (very great!) and who they should thank (you get one guess).

Buffer the bluster. Here are a half-dozen reasons why Trump is more foe than friend to that region and its people.

Labor: Mines gave northern Minnesotans jobs, but it was unions that won wages to lift them out of poverty. The Trump administration is decidedly pro-CEO (see: his tax bill slashing the corporate income tax by 40 percent) and openly hostile to workers. In February 2017, Vice President Mike Pence met with Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker to plot taking union-killing “right-to-work” laws national. Last fall, Trump’s Department of Labor snuffed out a union-led board to advise the feds on necessary safety measures for workers in the field. Because in Trump’s America, the only thing that deserves safety is profit margins.

Environment: These days, the North Country’s outdoors employs far more people than its mines. Trump, the ultimate indoorsman, trusts scientific “input” from Fox News, the businessmen who golf his courses, and, as it turns out, from anyone who gives his daughter a house. After the election, the Chilean billionaire owner of Antofagasta mining group bought a \$5.5 million house in Washington, D.C. and leased it to Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner. This spring, Trump’s Interior Department reinstated canceled leases for Twin Metals, Antofagasta’s proposed Minnesota copper-nickel mine. If acid backwash ruins the Boundary Waters, maybe Ivanka and Jared will show up with mops and sponges.

Canada: Our neighbors to the north stubbornly refuse to admit to a “trade deficit”... which Trump, in a private meeting with Republican donors, admitted he simply made up. (There’s actually a \$2 billion surplus running the other way.) No matter; Trump wants to tax Canadian steel and aluminum and set off a tariff slap-fight. That’s especially bad news for Duluth, where about a third of port traffic is bound for Canada. Minnesota sends grain and taconite north, and in return, gets products Canada’s now threatening to tax right back. Among them: Canadian whiskey, including Fireball, Minnesota’s most-consumed hard liquor.

Steel: Trump's trade war certainly looks like old-fashioned patriotic protectionism. (Though some of the steel we import from Canada comes from hundreds of millions' worth of Minnesota iron exported to Canada; see how that works?) But be warned: The Trump Organization might not be first in line to buy American. Just a decade ago, Trump built a hotel in Las Vegas with Chinese steel, and outfitted another in Chicago with Chinese aluminum. The president's cynical attempt to "save" American manufacturing is only necessary because financiers like him turned their backs on it to save money.

Opioid inaction: In St. Louis County, where the president's visiting today, heroin and opioid overdose deaths more than doubled from 2011 to 2015, and most of the county's 144 overdoses last year occurred in Duluth. Trump knows just what this crisis needs: a border wall, deportations, kicking people off Medicaid, and the death penalty for drug dealers, just a few of the ideas he floated in a rambling speech in March. Those, and "really great advertising," which he swears would convince people never to try drugs in the first place. To Trump, addiction isn't a public health crisis. It's a marketing opportunity to prove "Just Say No" needed better posters.

The elite's elite: Northern Minnesotans were supposed to like Trump because he shot them straight and wasn't a "D.C. insider," like Hillary Clinton. They got something different all right. Gone is the petty corruption inherent in bureaucracy. In its place is something humble, hard-working northern Minnesotans probably hate even more: Wall Street fat cats. His cabinet secretaries criss-cross the country in private jets and spend seven figures redecorating their offices. EPA Director Scott Pruitt hired his disgraced banker friend to turn "Superfund" environmental clean-up sites into a developers' sweepstakes. Jared Kushner takes lunches with hedge fund billionaires, while Don Jr. and Ivanka strike business deals with China. Trump's consumer "protection" board is standing up for payday lenders and Wall Street speculators. Meanwhile, the guy in charge keeps taking golf trips on the company credit card, only the "business" is the United States' budget, and the golf course is usually one he owns.

Expect Trump to bring up any or all of the above topics in his speech in Duluth. And to lie about them, to brag about all he's done, to tell these downtrodden people how lucky they are to have him. They need him as much as they need a ship stuck in the harbor.

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